



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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THE MODERN TRAINING OF GIRLS.

"There was never a great man who had not a great mother; it is hardly an exaggeration. The first six years of our life make us; all that is added later is veneer; and yet some say, if a woman can cook a dinner, or dress herself well, she has culture enough."—*Ralph Iron.*

I AM undertaking to-day to defend a cause—the higher education of women—although I have been assured by not a few that the cause needs no defence. It may be that the movement which many of us can remember as a mere seedling, has now grown up into so sturdy and deeply-rooted a plant, that it requires no more watering or protection. From time to time, however, lectures on the subject are delivered by men whose experience and ability give them a title to be heard, and whose attractive style certainly commands a wide circle of readers. In some of these addresses the whole system of giving girls as substantial an intellectual training as boys, is attacked from many points of view at once, and especially medical, social, and practical. Girls high schools, we are told, make the scholars ugly and sickly, and we are referred to a golden age in the past (an epoch, however, always to be suspected) when English girls, if they were not all like Kitty in Dame Durden—you remember the lines—

"Kitty was a charming maid
To carry the milking pail."

at least, learnt to extract essences and distil lavender water.

As I have distinct recollections of the training of girls before the days of high schools, which lead me to disbelieve the truth of such idyllic pictures of it, and as I feel convinced that the existing type of public schools for girls, if not perfect, is far superior to that which it has superseded, I have ventured to offer you a few observations in support of it.

I must confess that I commenced boyhood with a mind committed to those sweeping statements of Tom Tulliver, and his tutor, Mr. Stelling, in which they generalise dogmatically about the peculiar disabilities under which girls appear to suffer in comparison with their more stout-limbed brothers.

"Mr. Stelling," said Maggie, "could not I do Euclid and all Tom's lessons if you were to teach me instead of him?"

"No you couldn't," said Tom, indignantly. "Girls can't do Euclid, can they, Sir?"

"They can pick up a little of everything, I daresay," said Mr. Stelling. "They have a great deal of superficial cleverness, but they couldn't go far into anything. They are quick and shallow."

With these opinions I was, as a boy, quite at one. I had many sisters, and I felt sure they couldn't learn Latin. Larger experience has led me to sing a kind of palinode about the capacities of girls. I have discovered that the seeming obvious distinctions between the mental powers of boys and girls under analysis melt into each other and disappear. I have often asked teachers in Mixed Schools, who were teaching boys and girls together, whether they could distinguish between the mental powers of the sexes, but the oftener I enquired the more irreconcilable were the results of my enquiries. The estimate of one teacher contradicted that of another. I have found, for instance, as many to deny as to affirm the opinion that boys are quicker at figures than girls, and even in the case of handwriting I have noted that the superior skill is attributed variously by various teachers now to one sex and now to the other. The only clue to the discrepancies which I possess guides me rather to the varying powers of teachers than to the mental differences of the scholars. I believe that it is harder to impart instruction to boys than to girls in cases where discipline is not the teacher's strong point. It is certain that some teachers do find that they cannot teach boys and girls equally well, but inasmuch as there is no consistency in their experience, I find the explanation rather in the moral than in the intellectual nature of the two classes of scholars. The spirit of wilful opposition inherent in the human mind is more easily overcome in girls than in boys.

Where, however, the experience of teachers fails to draw a valid distinction between the mental powers of boys and girls, the physiologist steps in with an appeal to anatomy, and at first sight presents to us promising lines on which to mark out the limits which divide the male and female intellect. A woman's foot has, it appears, a flatter plantar arch than a

man's, and she is thus led to a frivolous preference for high-heeled boots. What further evidence is wanted to prove the light weight of feminine feather brains? It is clear that in the words of Hamlet, woman's intellect is inferior to that of a man "by the altitude of a chopine." Researches again into the vascular supply of blood to the brain seem to reveal a further point of distinction. The front part of the female brain is, in proportion to its size, less copiously bathed with the stream of life than the same division of the male brain. From this fact we should, it is said, infer that Nature intended us to leave girls to cook and sew and read good books, while their brothers master languages, science and mathematics. But then the thought occurs, "How are we to account for the numerous and increasing successes of women in intellectual pursuits?" If they were all won at the expense of health and strength, there would be no difficulty in finding a satisfactory explanation. It might be admitted that girls achieve intellectual success at the cost of their health. It is, however, not the case that women who have won the highest honours at the University have suffered afterwards in health. Shall we fall back on the assertion once current that intellectual power is the exception in women, and infer that intellectual success is an exception which proves the rule. At the present date the exceptions are becoming almost more numerous than the examples.

But the male brain, we are told, is a different organ from the female brain. This fact does not dispose me to alter my opinion respecting the comparative intellectual capacity of boys and girls, because I know that it is an inconclusive argument to draw an inference from difference in the organ to difference in the function. It appears to me certain that the brain, whether of man or woman was not evolved primarily for the study of literature, science, and art. Judging from analogy, I see no reason why either organ should not perform, as a secondary function, studies of this kind in a way peculiar to itself. It is a commonplace with the Naturalist that the same organ in different animals may perform with success different functions, while conversely the same functions may be performed by different organs. We have birds with wings which cannot fly, like the New Zealand owl-parrot; and beasts without wings which can fly like the flying-squirrel in the Malay

Archipelago. Nature can modify different parts for the same purpose, and similar parts for different purposes. The same parts in crabs may become either organs for breathing such as gills, or organs of locomotion such as feet. The female brain, if a different organ from the male, is proved able in far too many cases to be mere exceptions to a general rule, to stand with success the same sort of intellectual training as the male brain, and to produce the highest results of such training. Although it is a different organ, I observe that as a fact it is able to discharge the same kind of intellectual function as man's brain. It seems to me established that the degree of intellectual development attained by women depends, as in the case of men, upon the effectiveness of the mental training to which they have been subjected. A strong girl can be taught more, and that with less effort, than a boy less strong. As a rule, boys of a given age possess greater muscular power than girls of that age. They ought to do more work than girls, not because the quality of their intellect is superior to that of girls, but because they can stand a harder strain with profit to themselves.

The aim of making the best of women's powers physically, morally, and intellectually, will best be reached not by ignoring this physical difference between boys and girls as apparent in a wrestling match or (God save the mark) in a boxing match, but by subjecting boys and girls alike to a similar course of training both physical and mental, and by making due allowance for ascertained inferiority, whether in mind or body, and taking care to overtax neither boy nor girl. That boys should be trained to arms and girls to domestic duties is a reasonable opinion, but is it reason to argue that because boys learn the use of a rifle and girls the use of needle and thread, therefore they should not alike be acquainted with the use of logarithms, the poems of Lucretius, or the writings of Dante?

It appears to me a striking fact that the difference between the male and female brain is less, proportionately, among savage or less civilised people than among highly civilised. This seems to me to suggest that the degree of difference at present noticed is not natural so much as artificial, and that it may be the result of an irrational cultivation of woman's intellect in over civilised com-

munities. If this be the case, after over cultivating the more distinctively feminine attributes of the female brain at the expense of those which are common alike to men and women, male critics may now be seriously underestimating woman's mental capacity, mistaking for a natural distinction that which is due to highly artificial conditions. The habit of exaggerating woman's natural disposition and paying exclusive attention to her work as cherisher and nurturer in the family, has perhaps re-acted unfavorably on man as the warrior and breadwinner.

Many a man has been ruined in his career by a wife whose inferior mental training has given her no power to sympathise with her husband's pursuits, and who by the strength of her will and rich but uncultivated mental powers has misdirected his serious interests into mere frivolity and clever idleness. If both husband and wife have studied in their youth some important subjects, whether literary or scientific, with a similar degree of thoroughness, it is likely that they will have a community of interests and a power of understanding each other, the absence of which tends to make them throughout their lives "dwell together, yet apart."

Is not education, if it be of the best and not a course of cram, as much a revelation of mental powers as a development of them? The movement described as the Higher Education of Women has afforded girls an opportunity, which was usually denied to them before it commenced, of discovering their natural endowments. The more the education of girls is improved the more it will reveal to them what work they are severally best fitted to undertake. "What I should like to be sure of as the result of higher education for women," writes G. Elliot, "is their recognition of the great amount of social unproductive labour which needs to be done by women, and which is now either not done at all or done badly. No good can come to women more than to any class of male mortals while each aims at doing the highest kind of work which ought rather to be held in sanctity as what only the few can do well. I believe, and I want it to be well shewn, that a more thorough education will tend to do away with the odious vulgarity of our notions about functions and employment,

and to propagate the true Gospel that the deepest disgrace is to insist on doing work for which we are unfit—to do any sort of work badly."

What we want to arrive at is a kind of training for youth, in which both boys and girls alike shall be soundly prepared for life in proportion to their strength. To affirm that girls cannot do the same kind of lessons as boys is to go in the teeth of ascertained facts. The assertion that if girls do the same kind of lessons as boys they will be bad housekeepers, is considerably weakened by the perusal of one of George Elliot's letters in which she describes herself as studying "The Connection of the Physical Sciences," while her hand was yet trembling with the effects of stirring jam.

In the opinion of this same lady, one of the most learned and scholarly of our time, "the nicest room in a house is a clean kitchen."

Of course some girls have been badly educated, even after profiting by the new methods. A lady who had passed Cambridge Locals with distinction found herself in later life travelling with her husband in South Africa. Her negro servants one day ran away, as such servants often do after receiving their wages, and she had to be her own servant. Absolutely ignorant of housework, she commenced preparing breakfast as best she might, "because," as she said, "she could not bear to see a man starve." As an easy task for a beginner she bethought herself of a dish of poached eggs. So she boiled some water and cracked an egg over the saucepan. To her surprise and astonishment, as she afterwards described the incident, all the contents of the egg, except the yolk, as soon as they fell into the water, miraculously vanished from view! Paralysed by this mysterious phenomenon she threw up the attempt to cook a breakfast in despair. It was, however, needless for her husband to use strong and improper language about Cambridge Locals, for many ladies brought up at home on the old system, without their adventitious help, would have proved equally at fault if their culinary knowledge had thus been suddenly put to the test, and surely there is no valid reason why studies in Homer should be inconsistent with practice in the kitchen. A girl who has been brought

up without any training in Household Management is only half educated, but there has been quite as much neglect of this subject in Home Education as there has been in High School Education.

There are, however, some who while admitting that girls may be better taught than they used to be without danger to their characters as useful women, object to the machinery of modern education, and herein more especially to examinations. I do not defend the existing examination systems, which are crude and imperfect, and not always so adjusted as to promote the maximum of mental culture, with the minimum of physical strain, and I think monster examinations, in which candidates are examined by the tens of thousand in the same papers, reacts unfavourably on scholarship and really reminds us of the Chinese Mandarinat.

A principle, however, may be sound, although there may be imperfection in carrying it out. Far too many judicious and competent authorities support the principle of checking progress by aid of examination, that I should doubt its efficacy. I know from much experience what a deadly dull process it is for pupils of average ability to study year after year, without any method of measuring their progress, such as is afforded by a comparison of their attainments with those of other children of their own age. How gloomy are my recollections of schoolroom girls in former days, who were educated in the domestic circle, without ever sitting for public examinations. Nay, I have noticed about their training a monotony so terrible that it seemed to them worse than death. So far from all the hysteria and insanity that may prevail at the present time, being due to the examination mania, I believe, on the contrary, that these evils are far oftener remedied than produced by the reasonable exertion of the mental faculties which must precede a suitable examination. I believe that in many cases bodily strength actually depends upon the mental health which intellectual work suitably devised is able to produce. Girls may over-work themselves and so may boys. In both alike over-work is an evil which should be guarded against like over-eating or any other excess. What pursuit if taken up with inordinate zeal may not prove injurious or even fatal? But for every boy or girl who has been injured by over-work or

the effects of competition, I believe that a hundred could be produced who have failed in health and mental power, just because their mental training was not of a kind to enable them to concentrate their minds on any work which they might take in hand or to follow any single pursuit as a serious occupation. I have observed girls of well-to-do parents, whose minds had been disciplined by no harder work than a "study of novels and talk about the clergy," passing miserable lives, both in youth and afterwards. Having no purpose in life, and no power of forming any, I have seen them fall to brooding over some fixed idea, probably their own ill success, till the natural instinct to draw attention to themselves developed into a morbid self contemplation and ended in producing a determination to command the care and thought of others at all hazards, even if it were necessary to feign an illness for the purpose. By nursing an imaginary malady such women contract a real illness, or at any rate become the victims of an unbalanced temper, which keeps them in a perennial state of nervous irritation, and makes them a burthen to their parents and a nuisance to the household.

Preparation for an examination is the best way of developing habits of attention and concentration, and thus it fosters self-control. Women are naturally more emotional than men. It requires little confirmation from anatomy to persuade us of this fact. The question, however, for the educationist is not about the comparative strength of emotion in men and women, but how emotion may best be brought under the control of reason. "We women," says G. Elliot, "are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections, and though our affections are perhaps the best gifts we have, we ought also to have our share of the more independent life, and some joy in things for their own sake. It is piteous to see the helplessness of some sweet women when their affections are disappointed, because all their teaching has been that they can only delight in study of any kind for the sake of personal love. They have never contemplated an independent delight in ideas as an experience, which they would confess without being laughed at."

Psychologists tell us that in feeling and emotion alone there is no education possible. There is no reason to suppose

that as thought is linked with thought through association, so feeling can be linked with feeling to the highest education of feeling. Feeling can only be associated with feeling through thought accompanying feeling. Where one feeling seems to be associated with another, it is really not the feelings themselves that are linked together, but the thoughts that are associated with the feelings. Feelings are linked together not directly but through the mediation of thought. No one can remember a fit of anger detached from all incidents. It can only be recalled through some of the circumstances which are remembered in connection with it. Unless, then, we regard the anterior lobes of the brain in woman as too little in quantity, too soft in quality, and too little supplied with blood to be considered as more than an emotional appendage to the male brain, I believe we should give girls the same kind of substantial training of the mind which we give to boys. To save women from much misery, from much wounded self-love, from much physical and mental suffering, allow them the same intellectual interests as men, for in neither sex should a trade or a profession be the whole of life.

(To be continued.)

HISTORY:

HISTORY AND FICTION.

IN teaching history, besides the general object of personal discipline and development, which doubtless will in all cases be prominent in the mind of the teacher, our main object will be to produce some degree of retention of the facts taught. Retention is of two distinct sorts,—assimilative and mechanical. Assimilative retention, as pointed out in a former paper, is the great purely intellectual object we set before ourselves as educators; and mere mechanical memory will for this prove a valueless or comparatively valueless substitute. It is surely a wiser plan, more economical, more conducive both to permanence and to accuracy, rather to leave our undigested facts stored on the shelves of our libraries, where at need they may readily become available, than to cram them painfully into the unwilling brain to the exclusion of food more profitable. The mechanical memory may be indeed in some cases a gift of great value; but since the invention of written records its value in ordinary circumstances has fallen to a discount. The assimilative memory, on the other hand,—the memory which is alive, which consists of organised ideas, appropriated generalizations—is a memory for which bookshelves can furnish no substitute. By the fact of assimilation the individuality has been affected: the knowledge assimilated has become a vital and integral portion of the individual essence; it has become living knowledge, and henceforth, given light and air, and rain from heaven, it will grow and entwine itself through the whole labyrinth of human existence. In the mechanical memory the seed-corn has been hoarded up in the barn, as so much provender; in the assimilative memory it has been planted in a fruitful soil.